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INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0356
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0053
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7034
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5119
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3691
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0886
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3771
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0525
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2852
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7610
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5310
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1984
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000611

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND SCA/RA
MCC FOR S GROFF, D NASSIRY, E BURKE AND F REID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2017
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LTTE CLAIMS SECOND SUCCESSFUL AIR
STRIKE; FIGHTING INTENSIFIES

REF: A. COLOMBO 545
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 460
[1](#)C. COLOMBO 516

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) reported on their website Tamilnet that two small LTTE aircraft bombed the Palaly military complex in Jaffna at approximately 1:30 a.m. on April 24, "inflicting heavy damage and casualties." Sri Lankan government military spokesmen sought to play down the incident, stating publicly there was only one light aircraft, which Sri Lankan armed forces rebuffed with anti-aircraft fire. The GSL said the LTTE plane was forced to drop its "three or four explosive devices" outside the Palaly High Security Zone (HSZ) on targets of "no military significance." Both sides reported that the SLA and LTTE traded artillery after the air raid, with the Tigers apparently firing from the Pooneryn peninsula south of Jaffna, and the SLA returning fire from Palaly. Indian newswires reported secondary explosions for several hours after the initial air raid, fueling speculation that LTTE planes hit an ammunition depot. However, the Sri Lankan military denied those reports, asserting that all explosions were artillery-related. At approximately 11:30 p.m. on April 23, a claymore mine exploded along the Mannar-Vavuniya road, killing three civilians and wounding 37 on a bus. Media sources report ongoing heavy fighting in Mannar district close to Madhu, but military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe said it amounted to nothing more than a "routine" exchange of artillery. In the first reported abduction in Colombo in several weeks, a Tamil businessman was kidnapped by unknown perpetrators in a white van. End Summary.

LTTE AIR STRIKE -- DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF "SUCCESS"

¶2. (C) At approximately 1:30 a.m. on April 24, the LTTE launched its second air raid against GSL forces, this time on the Palaly military complex, which is adjacent to and shares a runway with the civilian airport for Jaffna. Military interlocutors told Defense Attache that soldiers on the ground spotted one LTTE light aircraft, but the plane did not show up on radar. Air Force sources believed it crossed into government-held territory near Point Pedro on the north coast and returned by the same route. The Army publicly insisted there was only one plane, but multiple sources told us privately it unable to rule out the possibility that there was a second one. The military cut off electric power and mobile phone service to the entire Jaffna peninsula during and after the incident, presumably to make it more difficult for the LTTE to identify targets.

¶3. (C) Both the Army and Air Force stressed that the area where the plane unloaded its bombs was "militarily insignificant" -- reportedly an army engineering center housed in bunkers in Myladdy, outside the Palaly High Security Zone. However, the SLA reported that eight soldiers were killed and 12 were wounded. An Indian newswire reported higher casualties, and also carried accounts of loud explosions continuing for several hours after the air raid, fueling speculation that an Army ammunition depot was hit. The military asserts that the explosions were LTTE artillery from Pooneryn and that the SLA returned fire from Palaly.

¶4. (SBU) The LTTE website Tamilnet offered few details of the attack, asserting merely that two LTTE airplanes successfully returned to base after "inflicting heavy damage and casualties." Tamilnet also confirmed that the LTTE and

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SLA traded artillery fire during the night, stating that it was a continuation of fighting that has stretched on for several days along the Forward Defense Line in Jaffna.

BUS BOMB AND ABDUCTION

¶5. (C) On April 23 at approximately 11:30 p.m., a claymore mine exploded in near a bus traveling on the Mannar-Vavuniya road. GSL sources report three people were killed and 37 wounded. This was very near a claymore attack on another bus on April 7, which killed and wounded many Tamil civilians. Tamil parliamentarian Selvam Adaikalanathan blamed the Army for the earlier attack, alleging that the bus was destroyed in retaliation for an earlier bus bomb that killed Sinhalese civilians (ref A). (Note: The Vavuniya area has become one of the most lawless and unstable in the country in recent weeks. It will be difficult to establish the authorship of the most recent attack, which may well be the responsibility of one of the several paramilitaries operating around Vavuniya.)

¶6. (C) Also on April 23, a prominent Tamil business man was abducted by armed and masked men in a white van while walking near his textile store in southern Colombo. Witnesses recorded the license plate of the van, and police are investigating. It is the first reported abduction within Colombo city limits since Ambassador presented a list of 347 abductees to Presidential Chief of Staff Lalith Weeratunga on March 20 (ref B).

HEAVY FIGHTING IN MANNAR?

¶7. (C) A local newswire service is reporting heavy fighting in Mannar district close to Madhu, along the southern border of LTTE-controlled territory. However, military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe denied the reports, stating that there may be a routine exchange of artillery, but that no "heavy fighting" is taking place. No reports of casualties are available.

18. (C) COMMENT: The LTTE's latest air raid is eerily similar to its first -- targeting a military base that shares an airstrip with a civilian airport. Like the first air raid, the extent of the damage inflicted is probably less important than the fact that it happened at all. It is another clear embarrassment for the Ministry of Defense. The GSL will likely pattern its reaction to this attack after its response to the air raid on Katunayake Air Force Base, downplaying its importance by ensuring that civilian flights continue without significant interruption. However, this latest incident will also certainly prod the military to redouble its efforts to find and destroy the LTTE's nascent air force. The GSL is likely to press for a rapid response from the USG to the Sri Lankan request for the U.S. to send a military team to assess Sri Lanka's air defense capabilities (ref C). Embassy would appreciate guidance soonest on the status of the U.S. response.

BLAKE